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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR HOSTS SCHOLTE TO CONGRATULATE ON SEOUL
PEACE PRIZE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador hosted a luncheon in honor of the 2008 Seoul Peace Prize recipient and North Korean human rights activist Suzanne Scholte on October 11, 2008. Scholte reflected on her twelve years of experience working to improve the human rights of North Koreans and highlighted the needs of North Korean refugees. Among others, Vice Foreign Minister Shin Kak-soo, Seoul Peace Prize Cultural Foundation Chairman Lee Chul-seong, Free North Korea Radio Director Kim Seong-min, and Fighters for Free North Korea Chairman Park Sang-hak joined in a full discussion of the human rights situation in North Korea. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ms. Scholte, in Seoul to receive the prestigious Seoul Peace Prize in recognition of her efforts to improve the human rights situation in North Korea, recounted her experience of twelve years working on the issue. Of all the North Korean human rights challenges, she said the plight of North Korean refugees, particularly, was as bad as it had ever been.

¶3. (SBU) Scholte encouraged more support for radio broadcasts to North Korea and balloon drops of pamphlets there as a means of loosening Kim Jong-il's iron grip on the people. Free North Korea Radio Director Kim Seong-min said that recent surveys of defectors showed that North Koreans were listening to Free North Korea Radio broadcasts. Fighters for Free North Korea Chairman Park Sang-hak said that recent evidence from defectors of a DPRK crackdown on people in possession of illicit pamphlets dropped by balloons indicated the effectiveness of the information campaign.

¶4. (SBU) The Ambassador emphasized the importance of the U.S. and the ROK working together on North Korean human rights and also underlined China's role. Vice Foreign Minister Shin said the ROK wanted to confront the DPRK over its human rights abuses and at the same time draw the DPRK to the negotiating table. The Lee Administration would be more aggressive than its predecessors in dealing with North Korean human rights -- for example, by supporting the UN Third Committee's upcoming resolution condemning the North Korean human rights situation -- but ultimately, if there was to be any improvement, North Korea had to come to the negotiating table.

¶5. (SBU) Former ROK Ambassador to the UN Park Soo-gil said that denuclearization and human rights were not an either-or proposition; each had to proceed in parallel. He said that the attention Scholte's receipt of the Seoul Peace Prize had drawn in the local and international media was an indication of the level of concern shared around the world for the people of North Korea. Park said governments and nongovernmental organizations each had a role to play, and, by working together, he hoped progress would be made on human rights in North Korea.

¶6. (U) Note: The Seoul Peace prize was established in 1990 to commemorate Korea's success in hosting the 1988 Olympic Games. Previous winners of the prize, which is awarded biennially, include former International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch, former U.S. Secretary of State George P. Shultz, Doctors without Borders, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, former UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata, Oxfam, former President of the Czech Republic Vaclav Havel, and Dr. Muhammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh.

¶7. (U) Participants:

Ambassador Stephens
Suzanne Scholte, Chairman, North Korea Freedom Coalition
Sin-u Nam, Vice Chairman, North Korea Freedom Coalition
Kim Seong-min, Director, Free North Korea Radio
Park Sang-hak, Chairman, Fighters for Free North Korea
Lee Chul-seung, Chairman, The Seoul Peace Prize Cultural Foundation
Park Soo-gil, Former ROK Ambassador to the UN
Shin Kak-soo, Vice Foreign Minister
Shin Dong-ik, MOFAT Director General International Organization Bureau
Cho Yoon-su, National Assembly Member
Joe Yun, Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs
Patrick Linehan, Minister-Counselor for Public Affairs
Bill Harwood, Friends of Korea Board Member
Stephen Wickman, Consul General, Shenyang
Phyllis Wickman
Kim Mi-yeon, Interpreter
Craig Hall, note taker
STEPHENS